

Preserving Our Open Lands

Fremont Open Space Initiative

Frequently Asked Questions

1. How can we afford to do this when we need money for schools?

How can we afford not to. A study of 234 New Hampshire towns found that taxes increased as development increased. One of the primary reasons for this is that new homes bring increased population to the schools in these towns and more demands on town resources. The taxes brought in by these new homes on average do not come close to covering the resources these properties and their inhabitants need. The way to decrease pressure on our already burgeoning school system is to try and decrease the number of new students coming into the school.

This bond issue is unique in that taxes will actually be lower than if we allow unrestricted development. Lower taxes means that there will be more money available to invest in schools. Without the land protection bond, we will have more students and need to spend more money on education just to keep standards as they are.

2. Wouldn't it be better to restrict new homeowners to be childless, older people? Then they wouldn't drive up education costs.

Although there are developments made specifically for people over 55 years of age, there is really no legal way to restrict who can or cannot live in a private home. Additionally, these "adult-only" subdivisions usually consist of smaller homes on smaller lots. Hence, the property values and tax revenue to the town is less than that of a larger family home. Any supposed gain in revenue made by housing restrictions is offset by a reduction in tax revenue.

3. Won't slowing residential growth mean higher taxes?

No. Careful analysis and also the experience of similar towns shows that the tax rates will increase less than if we allow unrestricted development. Each new household we add costs the town more in cost of services than that household pays in taxes. The rest of us must make up the difference in higher taxes. An additional benefit derived from increased preserved lands is that property values for the rest of us will rise.

4. Won't the town be taking money from the tax base by purchasing easements?

No. Many of the larger tracts of land that are undeveloped are current use properties. These properties add very little to the tax base now. Additionally, the cost of town services for new housing would exceed the tax money that the new housing would generate. Purchasing easements actually preserves the tax base.

5. If it's such a good idea, why aren't all the towns doing it?

All the towns are doing it! Bond issues for open space conservation have been approved in Newfields, Chester, Statham, Brentwood, Durham, Newmarket, East Kingston, Exeter and Rye just in the past two years. Many other communities recognized the need earlier and have had these programs in place for some time. In each of their cases, a shocking town incident such as the loss of a beloved farm, the plowing over of a piece of pristine forest or the incursion of a housing development that overstressed their town services brought them to action. Fremont has the unique opportunity to effect change before such an event happens here.

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6. Why Is the bond for 4 million dollars? Couldn't we do this for less?

Actually the entire cost is 8 million dollars. 4 million to be raised by this bond initiative and 4 million that will be given to the town through grants by various state and federal government agencies. When the Advisory looked at the decisions of surrounding towns and their size relative to Fremont, the bond amount seemed to be a moderate and therefore appropriate amount, especially since the land protection would result in lower taxes. It is important to remember that this venture will take place slowly over the course of years. The bond will not be issued nor will easements be purchased all at one time.

7. What will the tax impact be?

The Open Space Committee has provided a detailed analysis of how taxes will be impacted by this bond initiative. This is available on the Fremont website at www.fremont.nh.gov. Suffice it to say that the overall tax impact will be that your taxes will actually increase less by voting for the bond than they will without it.

8. What lands will be affected?

The Fremont Open Space Advisory and the Fremont Conservation Commission are working together to devise criteria that will be used to rate tracts of land in order of environmental and aesthetic importance, cost and, of course, availability.

9. How does this effect landowners?

It doesn't effect landowners at all unless they want to take advantage of the program. This is a completely voluntary program. This initiative gives willing landowners the tools and the opportunity to sell their development rights to the town. This can provide income to the property owners, allow them to retain ownership and permanently protect open space. We feel that most land owners in Fremont if given an alternative to selling to a developer will choose open space.

10. Doesn't having current use on land protect it enough?

Current use does allow an owner to keep land at a very reasonable tax rate or assessed value for a landowner who does not plan on developing his land, but if that landowner wants to sell, there is no alternative except to go to a developer. Selling just the development rights to the land will provide the owner with income while also allowing him to keep the land protected. If the owner wanted to sell the property, this plan could also make possible a sale to the town at full market value.

11. Will taking away developable land take someone else's job from him?

It is not the purpose nor the will of the bond issue to adversely effect jobs. There will still be development related jobs in this area. Rockingham County is among the fastest growing regions in the entire country. There are and will remain abundant local opportunities for development and construction work in this area.

12. Won't slowing residential growth mean higher taxes?

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13. What will happen to the value of my property?

It will increase. Fremont land will become more scarce so the law of supply and demand will increase the value of existing property. Additionally, maintaining the beauty of our town will increase the value of our property.

14. What if I want to have some of my land available for a family member(s) to have a house lot?

When the development rights are sold on a piece of land the owner's home would be excluded, of course, from the area to be put into an easement, so also could be designated acreage for a future house lot or lots for children, etc. Presumably this would be accessible to an existing road, not in the middle of the "open space". The owners of the future homes on the lot(s) would have the advantage of the protected land around them.

15. Who is the Open Space Advisory and who elected them?

The Open Space Advisory was announced in the November Town Newsletter which is mailed free of charge to every household in Fremont. It has also been featured in the local newspapers. Membership is open to all Fremont residents. All meetings are publicly posted and open to all residents, whether members or not.

16. Who is behind the open space bond petition?

As of last count, the petition has been signed by 121 registered Fremont voters, so they are the sponsors. By state law, any petition with at least 25 signatures must appear for vote at the annual town meeting. Currently, the bond issue has been endorsed by the Open Space Committee (a committee open to all interested town residents) and the town Conservation Commission.